

Message Text

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SUBJECT: BRITISH COLUMBIA VIEWS ON QUEBEC SEPARATISM:
QUARTERLY UPDATE

REF: A. 77 VANCOUVER 1197 B. VANCOUVER 213

1. SUMMARY. ALTHOUGH THERE IS UNEASINESS THAT QUEBEC MAY ULTIMATELY OPT FOR SEPARATION, THE ECONOMY REMAINS THE NUMBER ONE ISSUE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA. THE UNITY TASK FORCE HEARINGS IN VANCOUVER IN FEBRUARY SHED LITTLE LIGHT ON THE SEPARATISM ISSUE OR HOW TO SOLVE IT. B.C. PREMIER BENNETT AND LIBERAL LEADER GIBSON STRONGLY URGED CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN THEIR PRESENTATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. WE CONTINUE TO DETECT AN UNDERLYING UNEASINESS IN B.C. THAT QUEBEC MAY CONCLUDE OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS THAT ITS CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC INTERESTS ARE OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OVER ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS AND CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED THROUGH SEPARATION. NEITHER BRITISH
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COLUMBIANS NOR THE MEDIA, HOWEVER, ARE PREOCCUPIED WITH THE QUEBEC ISSUE. THEY ARE CONCERNED OVERWHELMINGLY WITH THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF SLOW GROWTH, CONTINUED INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT. QUEBEC CAME TO THE MEDIA FOREGROUND ONLY FOR SEVERAL DAYS IN FEBRUARY WHEN THE UNITY TASK FORCE HELD PUBLIC HEARINGS IN VANCOUVER. MOST OF THOSE PARTICIPATING IN THE HEARINGS (SEE REFTEL

B) DISPLAYED A STRONG COMMITMENT TO UNITY WITHIN CONFEDERATION AND GOODWILL TOWARDS QUEBECERS, BUT LITTLE LIGHT WAS SHED ON HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM OF SEPARATISM OR HOW TO SOLVE IT. A MAJOR THEME OF THE HEARINGS, ALTHOUGH WITH MANY DETRACTORS, WAS CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM.

3. IN HIS BRIEF TO THE TASK FORCE, PREMIER BENNETT PRESENTED THREE INITIATIVES WHICH CANADIANS "MUST NOW TAKE TO PRESERVE AND STRENGTHEN OUR COUNTRY": IMPLEMENTATION OF A NATIONAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY, RESTRUCTURING AND DEVELOPMENT OF FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL INSTITUTIONS TO REFLECT REGIONAL NEEDS, AND "REVISION AND MODERNIZATION OF OUR CONSTITUTION, PARTICULARLY THE DIVISION OF POWERS BETWEEN THE TWO SENIOR LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, BASED ON PRACTICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CONSIDERATIONS." SPEAKING OF THE PARTI QUEBECOIS ELECTORAL VICTORY IN 1976, BENNETT SAID "DISSATISFACTION WITH CERTAIN ASPECTS OF CANADIAN FEDERALISM IS NOT NEW NOR IS IT CONFINED TO QUEBEC." HE PARTICULARLY ADVOCATED THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE SENATE INTO A "PROVINCIAL HOUSE" WITH VETO POWER OVER "LAWS THAT REQUIRE A NATIONAL CONSENSUS OR LAWS THAT DIRECTLY AFFECT THE PROVINCES." IN HIS VIEW, A "CONSTITUTION WITH MORE FLEXIBILITY" COULD ACCOMMODATE NOT ONLY QUEBEC'S "PARAMOUNT CONCERN" OVER PRESERVATION OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BUT OTHER PROVINCES' ASPIRATIONS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO REDRESS UNEQUAL ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES.

4. B.C. LIBERAL LEADER GORDON GIBSON ALSO SAW THE SOURCE OF MANY OF CANADA'S PROBLEMS IN THE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AND ADVOCATED AT THE HEARINGS A RE-WRITE OF THE CONSTITUTION TO GIVE THE COUNTRY'S REGIONS MORE INFLUENCE IN OTTAWA. A REFORMED SENATE, HE SAID, SHOULD HAVE THE POWER TO BLOCK ANY FEDERAL MEASURE OF "REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE" AND SHOULD HAVE A "FAIR PROPORTION" OF FRANCO-PHONES AND NATIVE PEOPLES. HE WOULD ENTRENCH LINGUISTIC RIGHTS IN A NEW CONSTITUTION, AS WELL AS PROVIDE FOR A BILL OF RIGHTS, FREEDOM OF INFORMATION, PROVISIONS FOR REFERENDA, PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN THE SELECTION OF MP'S, A CLEARER SPLIT OF FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL JURISDICTION, A CONSTITUTIONAL COURT, AN AMENDMENT PROVISION, AND GUARANTEES OF THE RIGHTS OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH-SPEAKING CANADIANS.

5. IN A LENGTHY FEBRUARY 11 ADDRESS TO THE VANCOUVER INSTITUTE, J.V. CLYNE (FORMER MAC MILLAN BLOEDEL CHIEF, B.C. JURIST AND NEWLY ELECTED UBC CHANCELLOR) EXPRESSED HOPE THAT THE TASK FORCE MIGHT DEAL WITH CONSTITUTIONAL

REFORMS, ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT CLEARLY WITHIN ITS MANDATE. CLYNE HAS LONG TAKEN THE VIEW THAT A SMALL, COMPETENT GROUP OF NON-PARTISAN, NON-PAROCHIAL EXPERTS SHOULD BE APPOINTED BY TRUDEAU TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO PARLIAMENT AND PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURES OR TO A CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY AS A GROUNDWORK FOR NATIONAL DEBATE ON A NEW OR DRASTICALLY REVISED CANADIAN CONSTITUTION. LUPPI

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